

THE REBELUTION PRESENTS



DOWNWARD THINGS

OFFICIAL STUDY GUIDE

FOR PERSONAL AND GROUP USE.

BY **DAVID KOPP**
WITH **ALEX & BRETT
HARRIS**

THE OFFICIAL DO HARD THINGS STUDY GUIDE

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DEAR FRIEND,

If you're like us, talking with others about what you're reading helps you decide what you think and how to respond to what a book is saying. This chapter-by-chapter study guide is intended to help you do just that. Use it for personal study, if you wish, but we think it works best in a group. And the best group is one where you're surrounded by others who care about the same things you do and are ready to put truth into action.

Don't feel you have to process every question. It's not a test, and as often as not, there's no one right answer. Also, don't let our questions limit what you ask or where you go. Ask God to direct your thoughts and decisions. And ask Him for courage—lots of it. Because big ideas are weak ideas if we're not willing to let them shape how we think and live. So use this study guide to zero in on the ideas, choices, and actions that seem most promising and helpful to you and your friends. Then expect great things to happen in your lives as you do hard things for the glory of God!

Your Fellow Rebelutionaries,

Handwritten signatures of Alex Harris and Brett Harris in black ink.

ALEX AND BRETT HARRIS

CHAPTER ONE: MOST PEOPLE DON'T

A DIFFERENT KIND OF TEEN BOOK

“We believe our generation is ready to rethink what teens are capable of doing and becoming.” With that statement, the authors set the stage for a discussion about doing things differently. Then they identify the unique angle of *Do Hard Things*: instead of being a book where adults tell teens how to change, it’s a conversation among teens who are ready to lead the way. Alex and Brett talk briefly about their background and reasons for writing the book. They want teens to rebel against low expectations and reclaim the full potential of their teen years.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR REFLECTION:

- 1) *As you read the inside flaps of the book and the first chapter, how did you react to the authors’ talk about change, hard things, and “rebelution”?*
- 2) *Usually we try to look to older (hopefully wiser) people for life advice. Do you see any risks when teenagers—in this case, two nineteen year olds—try to persuade other young people to change how they think? On the other hand, what might be some advantages to the authors’ age?*
- 3) *“We don’t think ‘average teenagers’ exist,” write the twins. Do you feel average? If so, why? Does that ever feel like a good thing? If not, what is it that makes you feel not average?*
- 4) *The fictional Dundress monks were well intentioned but unhappy Christians who believed that more misery must mean more holiness. Have you ever thought that? Where do you think that kind of thinking comes from?*
- 5) *In what ways do you think popular culture misrepresents what the teen years are for? Can you think of one thing that would change if you and your friends believed—really believed—that low expectations were ripping you off?*

CHAPTER TWO: THE BIRTH OF A BIG IDEA

RUMBLINGS OF A REBELUTION

In this chapter, Alex and Brett tell the story of their journey from being bored teens to being Supreme Court interns, campaign workers, and blog hosts. But before they had new experiences they had new ideas—big ideas like:

- *Our generation is getting robbed!*
- *There has to be more to the teen years than goofing off.*
- *Ordinary teens can make a big difference in the world.*
- *Young people can handle big responsibilities.*
- *With big dreams come big challenges.*
- *What teens working together can accomplish is amazing!*

They close the chapter by inviting readers to join them in an uprising “against a cultural mind-set that twists the purpose and potential of the teen years and threatens to cripple our generation.”

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR REFLECTION:

- 1) *Looking back, do you see a season, a book, or an event that changed what you believe or how you live? If so, talk about it. How are you different now?*
- 2) *One teen told Alex and Brett, “Everyone I know at school is shackled by low expectations.” Could you say the same thing? If so, talk about why.*
- 3) *Have you ever found yourself responsible for a task that seemed too big for you to succeed at? If so, what happened? Did that experience turn out to be a bad thing or a good thing in your life?*
- 4) *Did you identify with the story of shy Heidi Bentley (pages 19-22)? If so, talk about it.*
- 5) *History shows that youth movements against God-established authority have generally not amounted to much. How do the authors set their message apart from such movements?*

CHAPTER THREE: THE MYTH OF ADOLESCENCE

EXPOSING EXPECTATIONS THAT ARE ROBBING OUR GENERATION

An elephant is an incredibly powerful beast that can be restrained by a piece of twine. (No kidding.) And that powerful animal just might be you, say Alex and Brett. Why? Because teens today buy into “the Myth of Adolescence.” That myth is an assumption that the teen years can’t add up to much and are meant to be spent as some sort of vacation from responsibility. Unfortunately, those low expectations end up trapping and limiting teens for no good reason. But it doesn’t have to be that way. Even the word teenager, the authors point out, is a recent invention. We can choose to live by higher standards. We can leave childish ways behind and grow up. We can decide to do hard things. That, say the twins, is where the Rebelution starts.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR REFLECTION:

- 1) *Have you ever visited a zoo, seen beautiful and powerful animals caged by glass or bars, and felt that something was terribly wrong? If so, talk about it. Why do you think some teens might identify with a wild but caged bird or animal?*
- 2) *Do you think that harmless-sounding lies about the teen years could be holding back both you and other teens you know? Talk about it.*
- 3) *What was your reaction to the stories of George, David, and Clarissa (pages 31-32)? Have you ever thought you could accomplish a lot more than you are now?*
- 4) *What do your parents expect you to do at home in an average week? Do you deliver? Be honest. How much time and effort does it take to do what’s asked of you? Do you think your parents require too much or too little?*
- 5) *Have you ever found yourself behaving very differently—and accomplishing a lot more—simply because someone expected you to? Describe the experience.*

CHAPTER FOUR: A BETTER WAY

RECLAIMING THE TEEN YEARS AS THE LAUNCHING PAD OF LIFE

This chapter starts with the story of Ray, a teen party guy who hasn't grown up, and isn't sure he wants to. He's choosing fun now over the future he says he wants. He's heading toward what the authors call "a failure to launch." Why? Because the teen years are like a diving board that, if we land on the right spot, will launch us into our best possible future. If we miss (or don't even jump), we risk never launching. Most of us know a Ray—a "kidult"—who still hasn't launched at twenty-five, thirty, or even older. The authors then identify five categories of hard things that promise to deliver high-impact results now and later if we do them.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR REFLECTION:

- 1) *Do you know a "kidult" like Ray? Describe his or her life. Do you think there's anything that anyone could say to this "Ray" that would motivate him or her to change direction? If so, what? If not, why not?*
- 2) *The authors write, "What each of us will become later in life largely depends on what we become now." Do you agree or disagree? What might a mature adult who knows you well say you are becoming?*
- 3) *The "strict training" Alex and Brett talk about doesn't sound appealing at first. But what might be some payoffs from that kind of discipline in your life now, and your dreams for your future?*
- 4) *Which of the five hard things that the authors list motivates you the most? Why?*
- 5) *What are some of the hard things you've already done in your life? What were the results? What would you say you learned through these experiences?*

CHAPTER FIVE: THAT FIRST SCARY STEP

HOW TO DO HARD THINGS THAT TAKE YOU OUTSIDE YOUR COMFORT ZONE

“Life is full of scary things,” write Alex and Brett. Most of us can relate! The problem comes when we let fear or discomfort limit what we attempt or dream for our lives. Most teens are afraid to speak in public, try something new, go somewhere new, or meet new people. Interestingly, all these experience usually turn out positively—or at least give us the most interesting stories. If we’re willing to act in spite of fear, risk failure when necessary, and trust God, our lives will change radically for the better. And we’ll accomplish more than we ever could have imagined.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR REFLECTION:

- 1) *Would you say that fear of failure or discomfort affects you (a) not at all, (b) a little, (c) often, or (d) all the time? Talk about your answer.*
- 2) *Identify the areas in your life where you try hardest to stay in your “cozy little routines.” In each case, what negative outcome are you most afraid of? What very positive outcome might come about if you took that first scary step despite your fears?*
- 3) *Most of us associate words like faith and courage with positive feelings. But Alex and Brett write that many who choose to act out of faith or courage actually experience intensely negative feelings, such as fear, uncertainty, worry, and doubt. If you have ever made a courageous choice but felt terrible while you were making it, talk about it. What happened? What did you learn?*
- 4) *Why might God be able to accomplish more through us when we act in spite of our weaknesses rather than out of our confidence or strength?*
- 5) *“Our story started with a simple step into the unknown,” Seth Willard says in this chapter. “But by God’s grace, our story has only just begun.” As you were reading this chapter, did any thoughts come to mind about a step into the unknown you should or could be taking? If so, what is it?*

CHAPTER SIX: RAISING THE BAR

HOW TO DO HARD THINGS THAT GO BEYOND WHAT'S EXPECTED OR REQUIRED

What happens when we measure ourselves or our actions against a bar—and that bar is set too low? We might feel good at first, but we're likely to feel misled and cheated in the long run. In this chapter the twins explore how phrases like "Just do your best" can do more harm than good. Comparisons with how others perform don't help either. Instead, teens need to reject complacency by choosing values like "Do what's hard for you," and "Pursue excellence, not excuses."

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR REFLECTION:

- 1) *The Bible says, "The complacency of fools destroys them." Do you think it's possible to be popular, smart, and successful and still be complacent and foolish? If so, how?*
- 2) *Most teens show above-average abilities in at least one area. According to Alex and Brett, what's the danger of defining ourselves by that one area?*
- 3) *"Don't do bad stuff" can easily be the default standard of excellence in church circles. Do you see any problem with that? Talk about it.*
- 4) *Go through the questions on pages 101 and 102. Talk about your answers.*
- 5) *If you decided to measure every area of your life by "excellence, not excuses," what kinds of changes would the people around you start to notice?*

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE POWER OF COLLABORATION

HOW TO DO HARD THINGS THAT ARE TOO BIG FOR YOU TO DO ALONE

Alex and Brett tell the story of Katrina, a girl who had a question she couldn't figure out on her own. Her commitment to get answers led her to find other teens who could help her—and an online survey that pulled in almost half a million hits in the first twelve hours. Instead of turning away when an idea seems too big for us, the twins argue, teens should turn to collaboration. The fact is, when we work with a team of like-minded rebelutionaries, we can do together what we could never have done alone. The chapter suggests ten practical things the brothers have learned working with teams.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR REFLECTION:

- 1) *Have you ever cared a lot about a project only to drop it because you couldn't do it alone? If so, talk about that. What might have happened differently if you'd had a team around you to help accomplish that goal?*
- 2) *Have you ever experienced the extra energy or impact a team can generate—in sports, drama, or some other setting? If so, what was it like?*
- 3) *Alex and Brett talk about how important it is for teens to “walk with the wise.” What do they mean by this principle, and why does it matter?*
- 4) *All of us have been on some kind of team: sports, academic, community, church, or work. What, in your experience, makes the good ones terrific and the bad ones miserable?*
- 5) *As you were reading this chapter, did a “too big for just me” but important goal come to mind? How could you act on that thought or desire? (Hint: Begin with the first thing the authors learned about teams: “Start with questions.”)*

CHAPTER EIGHT: SMALL HARD THINGS

HOW TO DO HARD THINGS THAT DON'T PAY OFF IMMEDIATELY

Why is it that following through on small tasks can be such a huge chore? Alex and Brett wrestle with that question in this chapter for a good reason: although small hard things trouble everyone, they often they lead to some of the biggest payoffs. Many long-term successes are built on life skills that come from doing small hard things—self-discipline, honesty, consistency, thoughtfulness—and doing them repeatedly over a long period of time. The authors point to the Vikings as an example of powerful seamen who nearly always defeated their enemies in battle. Their success was partly due to one simple fact: they rowed their own boats into battle and were seriously ripped!

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR REFLECTION:

1) *Have you ever felt like Joanna—“ready and motivated to tackle something big and exciting, but stuck against your will in a seemingly endless round of chores”? If so, talk about it. Why do you think small hard things can be so hard for teens?*

2) *What are the small hard things you struggle with most? Describe some of the self-talk that goes on in your head that makes doing those tasks even harder.*

On pages 135-137, the authors identify the top five reasons why doing small

3) *tasks is so hard, as well as five ways we tend to respond in not-so-rebelutionary ways. Talk about the five reasons and come up with a rebelutionary response to each.*

4) *How could doing everything for God's glory (see 1 Corinthians 10:31) radically influence how you think about and complete small hard things?*

5) *See what you come up with in response to this three-step suggestion from page 143: “Do you have a big goal for your life that you can't achieve without a commitment to small hard things? (1) Write down your big goal. Then (2) write out the small hard things that help you achieve it—and (3) how faithfully doing those small hard things now will help you achieve your dream later.”*

CHAPTER NINE: TAKING A STAND

HOW TO DO HARD THINGS THAT GO AGAINST THE CROWD

What the crowd says wields enormous influence on most teens. That's not always a bad thing, but if we're not careful, following the crowd can lead us far astray. In this chapter Alex and Brett talk about why going against cultural norms is a challenge every rebelutionary will eventually face. Then they suggest six principles to help teens "stand at the right time, for the right thing, and for the right reasons."

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR REFLECTION:

- 1) *When Eva decided to live for Christ, she had to make choices that isolated her from her friends. Have you ever had a similar experience? If so, talk about it.*
- 2) *Do you think it's harder to take a stand for what's right around friends who say they are Christians or around friends who don't? What are some of the different challenges in each case?*
- 3) *Can you think of an example of a Christian you know who took a stand on an issue but made a choice that didn't seem wise to you—and perhaps the outcome wasn't positive either? If so, describe what happened. Applying the authors' principles listed on page 157, how could that person have made a wiser choice?*
- 4) *Alex and Brett include a letter from a guy who mostly disagreed with the values of the Modesty Survey but admired how the site responded to critics. Do the Christians you observe generally deal with critics respectfully, or generally not? If so, how? If not, how could they improve?*
- 5) *Is there a stand you know you should be taking but haven't? What are you willing to do about it, starting now?*

CHAPTER TEN: GENERATION RISING

CREATING A COUNTERCULTURE FROM SCRATCH (AND A DASH OF SALT)

Now that the authors have described the Rebelution at a personal level, they take the discussion global. What would happen, they ask, if rebelutionaries saw a world-sized need and acted? What would happen if the Rebelution became a counterculture that transformed a generation? Alex and Brett look to two simple but profound word pictures to show what that God-honoring movement might look like: salt and light. Jesus said his followers are both. As salt, we fight corruption and preserve good. As light, we shine truth where lies hold people in darkness. To bring change, a godly counterculture must be supported by what Alex and Brett call “the three pillars of the Rebelution”—character, competence, and collaboration.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR REFLECTION:

- 1) *Conner Cress's normal life got turned upside down one day when he encountered pictures of hungry, hopeless children. Have you ever had a similar experience that changed how you saw the world? If so, talk about it.*
- 2) *Do you see signs in your life and among your friends that teens today want to make a real difference in the world? If so, what do you notice?*
- 3) *The brothers deliver a mission statement for rebelutionaries: “We are change makers who influence our world both as salt and light. That is to say, we influence our world both by fighting against sin, suffering and decay and by fighting for truth and justice.” In what ways are you already engaged in these fights? In what new ways do you think God is inviting you to engage?*
- 4) *On pages 176 to 179, Alex and Brett talk about how we need character, competence, and collaboration to truly succeed in our endeavor. Do you agree? Which pillar comes hardest for you, and why?*
- 5) *If you were to identify one passion as your “holy ambition,” what would it be? Do others know about it? If so, do you feel supported by them? How could knowing your holy ambition help you make decisions and set priorities in the months and years ahead?*

CHAPTER ELEVEN: A THOUSAND YOUNG HEROES

STORIES OF NEW BEGINNINGS, IMPOSSIBLE CHALLENGES AND THE TEENS WHO ARE LIVING THEM

“Through this book we’ve asked what it would look like for our generation to start living out the principles of the Rebelution,” write the authors. “The truth is that in many ways it’s already happening.” As evidence, they introduce readers to young people like Zach Hunter, Jazzy Dytes, Brittany Lewin, Leslie and Lauren Reavely, Brantley Gunn, and Leeland Mooring. Each is an “unlikely hero” of the Rebelution—and proof that every teen who desires to follow Christ can be part of this movement.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR REFLECTION:

- 1) *Alex and Brett write, “Thousands of young people whose examples defy silly labels like ‘ordinary’ or ‘exceptional’ are creating a whole new set of expectations.” Would you say that right now you (a) definitely, (b) mostly, (c) a little, or (d) not at all want to be a part of the movement the brothers describe? If you are hesitant, describe what is holding you back.*
- 2) *Which of the stories in this chapter meant the most to you personally? Why?*
- 3) *In telling Zach’s story, the guys write: “Zach had found a cause that was bigger than his fear.” What is the biggest fear that is keeping you from becoming a change maker for Christ? Where do you think that fear comes from? What does it tell you about yourself?*
- 4) *Jazzy’s big change happened when she moved from “rebel” to “rebelutionary.” Which side of that choice are you on right now? Why?*
- 5) *In nearly all the stories in this chapter, the “unlikely heroes” simply said “Yes, God” to a need or an opportunity that was right in front of them. Do you sense God showing you a similar need or opportunity? If so, what is it? How do you plan to respond?*

CHAPTER TWELVE: WORLD, MEET YOUR REBELUTIONARIES

TRANSFORMING YOUR MISSION FROM A DECISION INTO A DESTINY

In this closing chapter, Alex and Brett review the main ideas they've covered. Now that the reader has a clear view of a new way of life, they offer some practical advice to get "from big idea to meaningful change." They introduce three typical teens—Noah, Serena, and Brandon—and offer problem-solving ideas for how they can get past their distractions and obstacles. One more story is yet to be told—"and that story is yours."

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR REFLECTION:

- 1) *You're carrying Do Hard Things through the school library, and you meet a friend who asks, "Hey, what's that book about?" What do you say?*
- 2) *Which part of this book inspired you the most? Which part made you the most uncomfortable? Explain why.*
- 3) *Working from the "five-step rebelutionary action plans" that the authors share for Noah, Serena, and Brandon (pages 214–24), what is your action plan to deal with the distractions and obstacles you face? Get help from friends, family and other advisers as needed to create the smartest plan possible. Write it down. Then keep your five-step plan where you can read and review it every day.*
- 4) *Mentally, travel forward one year in your life. What do you hope will be different then that wouldn't have been if you hadn't read Do Hard Things? Five years forward, what's your answer to the same question? Twenty years forward?*
- 5) *Take time in the coming weeks to reflect on the following passages about four inspiring Bible rebelutionaries: David in 1 Samuel 16–17 and Psalm 18; Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1; Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:1-18 and Philippians 3:12–4:13; and Timothy as seen in Paul's letters to him in 1 Timothy 4:1-16 and 6:11-21 of 2 Timothy. Write down key truths from these passages in your own words and reread the truths and the verses often.*

APPENDIX: DO HARD THINGS, THE GOSPEL, AND YOU

In this brief message, Alex explains that while the principles of the book apply to everyone (truth is truth, after all), “we would never have written this book or encouraged you to do hard things if we didn’t have a Bible-shaped, gospel-driven view of life.” Then using just four words—God, man, Christ, response—Alex sets out what it means for a person to hear the good news of salvation and new life in Christ and to respond to it personally. The transformation that Jesus offers is possible only because He accomplished the ultimate hard thing: He died in our place and paid for our sins. Knowing Christ as personal Savior not only opens up eternal life with Him for believers, explains Alex, but also gives us the power and motivation to spend our lives joyfully serving Him and seeking to bring positive change to our world in His name.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR REFLECTION:

- 1) *Before you read this appendix, would you have described yourself as a Christian? Why or why not?*
- 2) *Did Alex’s presentation of the good news of salvation help you see something you had missed before about what it means to be a Christian? If so, what?*
- 3) *If you are not a Christian, try to identify what questions or concerns are preventing you from responding to the gospel. Can you identify a Christian you could talk to honestly about these questions or concerns? What steps could you take to bring closure on this most important decision of your life?*
- 4) *If you are a Christian, are there steps you can now identify that would help others around you to know more clearly where you stand with Christ? If so, write them out and attach an action timeline so you don’t just let them slip.*
- 5) *If you haven’t already done so, it’s time to think about how you can spread the message of the Rebellion to others! Who could you buy a copy of Do Hard Things for? What blogs could you visit, e-mails could you send, or calls could you make? What group could you bring together for a study and strategy session?*

**"NOW TO HIM WHO IS ABLE
TO DO FAR MORE ABUNDANTLY
THAN ALL THAT WE ASK OR THINK,
ACCORDING TO THE POWER AT
WORK WITHIN US, TO HIM
BE GLORY IN THE CHURCH AND
IN CHRIST JESUS THROUGH
ALL GENERATIONS, FOREVER
AND EVER. AMEN."**

— PAUL IN EPHESIANS 3:20-21